

Zehnder Family



he Zehnder family name has been in Frankenmuth since the second year the German settlement was founded. A shoemaker named Johann Stephan Zehnder arrived here in 1846. His descendants are now world famous in the restaurant business with their Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn and Zehnder's Restaurant. The family of his great-grandson William Zehnder Jr. also owns and operates this Bavarian Inn Lodge.

Johann Stephen was born May 10, 1810 in Weissenbronn. His parents were Johann Stephan and Maria Barbara (Weber) and he was the youngest of their eight children. He married Margaretha (Fuerwitt) in about 1835. The couple had three children in Germany: Johann Sigismund was born August 1, 1836; Maria Margaretha was born June 3, 1841; and Johann Friederich was born June 20, 1843.

In 1844 and 1845, there was an interesting movement going on in Margaretha's hometown of Neuendettelsau. The local Lutheran pastor Rev. Wilhelm Loehe felt it was his responsibility to answer a plea from America for missionaries. He organized a mission society and recruited 15 volunteers to travel to mid-Michigan to establish a German Lutheran settlement. Their goal was to convert the heathen in the Saginaw Valley to Christianity.

The first colonists were hardly organized in their new settlement when plans for the second group of immigrants were made. Johann Stephan, his wife and children were among the more than 90 persons who arrived in Frankenmuth that second year. Apparently they heard the convincing sermons of Loehe who was known for his charismatic style. They joined the group and set sail in a converted tobacco ship, the G.Duckewitz, on March 6, 1846. Johann Stephan was 36, Margaretha was 33, Johann Sigismund was 9, Maria Margaretha was 5, and Johann Friederich 3.

Margaretha gave birth to their fourth child Katherine sometime during the ocean voyage to America.

After seven weeks of stormy weather, the immigrants arrived in New York harbor May 9. It took them another three weeks to travel by train, steamboat, canal boat, wagon, and on foot to the settlement of Frankenmuth. At first they lived in the crude homes of the original settlers. Eventually they built their own log cabins on land they purchased for about \$2.50 an acre.

The 1850 census lists Johann as a shoemaker. Later he is identified as a farmer. The couple had three more children after they arrived in Frankenmuth: Gertrude was born in 1849, Melchior in 1852 and Barbara in 1854. Johann died March 30, 1875 at the age of 65. His wife died December 2, 1888 at the age of 76. Their descendants now exceed 886.

The couple's son, Johann Friederich (June 20, 1843 to June 9, 1911) married Anna Barbara nee List (July 17, 1848 to April 24, 1926) in 1868 and they became farmers. They owned acreage south of Jefferson on the east side of what is now Main Street and Weiss Street. Johann also rented farmland, raised livestock and owned a slaughterhouse.

Johann Friederich and Anna Barbara had 12 children: Johann Sigmund, George Christian, John Michael, Georg Carl, Herman Friedrich, Catharina Barbara Sophia Ardussi, Anna Margaretha Bertha Conzelmann, Johann Matthias Wilhelm, Margaretha Barbara Regina Regner, Maria Barbara Johanna, Ernst David Friedrich and Adolph Johann Sebastian.

Johann Matthias Wilhelm (William, Sr.) married Emilie (Bickel) and began the family's famous tradition in the Frankenmuth restaurant business in 1927.



Researched and compiled by Bavarian Inn Lodge
For copies of Family Histories go to www.bavarianinn.com/familyhistory